DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 293 FL 023 689

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TITLE Ditch the Dictionary: Finding a Vocabulary Comfort Zone. Vocabulary, Reading and Multiple Intelligences in an English as a Second Language Classroom.
PUB DATE 29 Mar 96
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (30th, Chicago, IL, March 26-30, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; College Faculty; College Second Language Programs; *Dictionaries; *English (Second Language); Faculty Development; Foreign Students; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; *Intelligence; Learning Theories; Program Descriptions; *Reading Instruction; Resource Materials; Second Language Instruction; *Second Languages; *Vocabulary Development
IDENTIFIERS Johnson and Wales University RI; *Multiple Intelligences

ABSTRACT

This paper describes "Ditch the Dictionary," a college faculty development workshop at Johnson and Wales University (Rhode Island) that applies the theory of multiple intelligences to vocabulary development and reading instruction in the English-as-a-Second-Language classroom. It was found that the institution's international and immigrant students were anxious about vocabulary use, overused the dictionary, and felt real learning was always by rote learning, traits not found compatible with good reading practice. A classroom technique for opening a reading course is described: having students reflect on a memorable learning event, so that they may realize that individuals process information in different ways. Theories of multiple intelligences and learning styles are then reviewed briefly, and a list of internal questions used by good readers to attack a new word is offered, along with several additional techniques. (Contains 16 references, and a list of ten ways to apply multiple intelligences theory in the ESL vocabulary class is appended.) (MSE)

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ED 394 293

Ditch the Dictionary:
Finding a Vocabulary Comfort Zone

Vocabulary, Reading and Multiple Intelligences in an English as a Second Language Classroom

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"Education needs to accomplish far more than transmitting a fund of knowledge. Besides helping with facts, it must foster understanding."
David Perkins
Project Zero, Harvard University

Ditch The Dictionary began as a teacher training workshop presented at the International Institute of Rhode Island in 1994. What evolved was a discussion of possibilities for applying Howard Gardner's Theories of Multiple Intelligences in a vocabulary classroom. Could teachers work with traditional EFL/ESL students in non-traditional ways? Specifically, was it possible to encourage students to discover a reserve of untapped ability and apply these intelligences to enhance learning styles to begin to learn in entirely new ways? The following five trimesters were spent experimenting with some of these ideas in an advanced ESL reading and study skills course. The following describes some methods and techniques that were applied.

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THE STUDENT POPULATION

The English Language Institute at Johnson and Wales University has a mix of undergraduate and graduate students who choose a range of majors from Hospitality and Culinary, to International Business, Technology and Education. Because we offer a for-credit ESL option many of our students begin their careers at Johnson and Wales by entering through the English Language Institute.

Admission to Johnson and Wales requires a TOEFL score of 550 or better. Typical scores for entering ESL students range from about 440 to mid-500's. Some students with acceptable TOEFL scores opt for the E.L.I. feeling that the program provides a solid foundation in academic English.

While the student population is varied, a typical student is Asian, in his or her early 20's and places into an advanced reading level. Students from this group are more likely to be traditional learners. They tend to suffer from a high level of vocabulary anxiety and to be dictionary overusers. Two traits not always compatible with good reading.

VOCABULARY? WE'VE COME A LONG WAY!

Let's take a quick look at how far we have evolved, not only in how we teach vocabulary, but in attitudes to learning. In the 50's West published his General Service List of Essential English. Such a list, of course, assumed that learning is memorization. Translation for students, "mastery of the list leads to better reading..." Bloom (1956) began to look at the acquisition of knowledge as a logical /thinking process. Perhaps contributing to the emergence of the critical thinking school of the 80's. Thinking remained a linear process with the teacher still primarily responsible for the direction of thinking within the classroom. Gardner's (1990) treatment of Multiple Intelligences opened up a truly learner focused theory which encouraged student self knowledge along with teacher awareness of other ways of knowing (Armstrong, 1990). By guiding students to explore and identify learning preferences, teachers became "cooperative advocates" (Armstrong, 1991) encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

GETTING STARTED

Many of our students continue to cling to the idea that the only real learning is rote learning. For this reason., somewhere during the first week of a new reading course it is useful to have students become reflective. At this time, have students recall early learning experiences or describe a particularly memorable learning event. Here is where students begin to recognize that we

don't all process in the same way. This exercise often becomes quite lively and serves as a great ice-breaker in getting students to relax and become familiar with this rather unconventional approach that we will be using for the rest of the trimester.

Before we begin to explore ways to use classroom time to enable our students to develop better word attack skills, it might be useful to explore some of the ways individuals learn and process information. During the last two decades there has been growing acceptance among educators of the notion that there is more than one way to be intelligent. Those who ascribe to this concept believe that all learners bring their own unique behaviors, perspectives and talents to the learning experience. Lazear terms it "Ways of Knowing"; Armstrong "Seven Kinds of Smart". Gardner used the expression "Multiple Intelligences".

The chart which follows is an adaptation of Armstrong's ideas:

Seven Kinds of Smart

WORD SMART	CONVENTIONAL
MATH/LOGIC SMART	STILL TRADITIONAL
PICTURE SMART	THE VISUALIZER
MUSIC SMART	RHYTHMIC/MELODIC
BODY SMART	PHYSICAL EXPERIENTIAL
PEOPLE SMART	GROUPIES/SHARERS
SELF SMART	INTUITIVE/PERCEPTIVE

Most of us possess some degree of all these styles. Comfort levels vary and students may summon any combination to a processing task. For most, however, one kind of smart dominates. Because traditionalists often reward more conventional learning styles, exemplified as WORD or LOGIC smart, perceptive SELF smarts, or artistic PICTURE smart visualizers can become discouraged learners. This is more likely when students come from educational backgrounds where differences are not tolerated. These students internalize quite early that the only real "smarts" are WORD or LOGIC smarts. For others being WORD/LOGIC smart has brought a level of success when success is measured by ability to collect and report back large amounts of information. Our challenge is to help these students rethink old learning habits, especially habits which may be depriving them of success in American colleges.

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APPLYING WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT GOOD READING

Good readers have at their disposal a repertoire of vocabulary attack skills. Many of these are transferrable from the L_1. When a challenging item is encountered comfortable readers make decisions about the word by calling upon an internalized checklist of questions:

- **Do I know this word?**
- **If so, how do I know it?**
- **If I don't know it, do I need to know it?**
- **If I need to know it what approach can I use to figure it out?**
- **Can I apply my knowledge of language or grammar to decipher meaning?**
- **Can I look for context clues?**
- **Can I guess a possible meaning?**
- **Is it possible that the word is not worth knowing?**

DO I KNOW THE WORD?

Advanced readers decide that a word is familiar based on previous experience with the item. It has already been learned. It is similar to something already learned. It has, though this is risky, something linguistically in common with the L_1.

CAN I DEDUCE THE WORD?

As we learned earlier, good readers use a number of mechanisms to deal with words. Primary among these is the word part approach. The prefix and suffix of a word provide useful clues. As students master these stems and affixes, the clues they contain become recognizable. Spending non-reading time mastering these is essential and is especially appealing to conventional learners. There are a number of classroom word building/word dissection games that are both fun and pay off later as comprehension improves. Here is a good time to encourage "other" learners to experience the words rhythmically, visually, associatively.

Advanced readers will encounter new words and examine them within the sentence. Try asking suggestions from students. What part of speech is it? Why? Is it part of a logical word grouping (collocation)? Are there signal words which might denote cause and effect, concession, contrast, negation?

Unfortunately, parenthetical definitions don't just jump out at our students. With direction, students can learn to recognize definitions in context. Some students may need encouragement to "see" transition words, signals and punctuation as little arrows "pointing" to a definition. For others, hearing the sentence intoned helps "hear" meaning. A little TPR goes a long way in an elementary ESL classroom. I'm not sure how fondly some college students will respond to getting physical; however, I often find myself resorting to calisthenics if I think it will get the point across.

DECIDING TO IGNORE A WORD

Deciding to ignore a word is sometimes the best plan of defence. This can be a problem for many ESL students as it requires both a change in attitude and giving up control. Students who are highly literate in the L_1 or those who are rule governed often fear the ambiguity of not knowing. During reading, point out to this type of student that frequently the meaning of a word is made clear later in the passage. We may never learn the meaning, but as comprehension remained unhindered we didn't need to know it. Later, to satisfy curiosity or to expand vocabulary we can look it up. It is a safe bet that the majority of students will do just that!

HOW DO WE PIECE IT ALL TOGETHER?

We touched earlier on the MI Theories when we looked at Armstrong's Seven Kinds of Smart. A large percentage of our international students, we can conclude, probably are or attempt to be WORD/LOGIC smart. What can we discover about other kinds of smart that we can apply in our present reading classes? How we learn is part habit, part preference. Therefore, a change in behavior and a change in attitude is especially necessary. There are a number of ways we can encourage a young adult learner to work with an intelligence rather than against it. Putting MI Theories to practice does not require a total about face, nor an attempt at relabeling students, rather a simple change in thinking about thinking.

Vocabulary learning lends itself nicely to other ways of thinking. Items may be conceptual, experiential or tangible. A word might easily be seen by a PICTURE smart student. The BODY smart might play it out mentally. While a SELF smart individual may attempt to personalize it, bring it home emotionally.

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How often have we carried a puzzling concept around for a while only to see it more clearly while exercising, listening to music or talking with others?

The reading curriculum is often the place where many students begin to refine their study skills. Encouraging our students to discover more about how they learn provides a wealth of techniques that can be applied to future thinking/ learning events. It can surely serve to enrich the learning experiences of students who may have been frustrated by conventional academics.

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TEN WAYS TO APPLY MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES IN AN ESL VOCABULARY CLASS:

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1. ***Learn as much as you can about MI and about other cultures and cultural attitudes to learning.***

2. ***Select a time that is comfortable and appropriate to teach about MI and how you can all try to practice this in the classroom.***

3. ***Model and practice a variety of processing activities that will "talk to" all intelligences.***

4. ***Experiment with non-traditional "smarts". Demonstrate the visual and kinesthetic. Some students may feel intimidated at first but this will draw out the creators, the dancers and the intuitives...***

5. ***Never oblige reluctant students to participate in an exercise they do not feel ready for. Never cause students to feel that these exercises may be graded or evaluated.***

6. ***Just as we all learn differently, we all require different lengths of time to process information. Allow students time to observe the class in action. Remember this may be a natural demonstration of their own personal learning style.***

7. ***Some students will take to this novelty immediately. Others may express relief or revelation that hidden talents are finally being discovered and appreciated.***

8. ***Identify different learners and when a rapport develops begin to pair and group students so that each can learn from and help the other.***

9. ***Reaching for the dictionary is a reflex for many students. Request that students leave the dictionary at home or buried in a backpack. If this is stressful move dictionaries an arms length away. The simple action of having to reach for it will demonstrate just how habituated many folks are to the dictionary.***

10. ***MI has a lot to do with preferences and individual styles. It is important that we not push our students to do something they are not happy with. Above, all MI is about improving, enhancing and enjoying the learning process. It is never an excuse for labeling.***

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